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AN APPRAISAL OF THE REVISED NIGERIA CERTIFICATE IN EDUCATION MINIMUM STANDARDS (ENGLISH LANGUAGE CURRICULUM)

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Abstract

This paper gives a concise appraisal of the revised Nigeria Certificate in Education Minimum Standards (English Language Curriculum). The certificate is the basic qualification for teaching. It is a sub-degree (certificate course) and professional teacher diploma, which is obtained after 3 years (full time) at a college of Education (Lassa, 2000).

The recent review of the Minimum Standards (Curriculum) of colleges of education by the National Commission for Colleges of Education will be described as a bold stride since curriculum in Nigeria has been viewed as irrelevant to the needs of the students (Okebukola, 2013; Uma, Obidike & Ogwuru, 2013). Teacher education in the country is in a deplorable state and 'the teacher training programmes have been indicted' (Ajelayemi, 2002, cited in Ajelayemi, 2005, para. 5). The review has engendered this appraisal as the penultimate edition of the curriculum was trailed by widespread criticisms.

The paper intends to demonstrate the fact that the implementation of the English Language curriculum may suffer setbacks, if some strategies are not established as the quality of college entrants (Akinbote, 2007), the overcrowded classrooms, the non-provision of technological facilities (Adedeji, 2011) and the poor state of libraries in colleges of education (Mohammed, 2012) are pivotal issues that require proactive solutions.

It recommends a review of the admission policy, decongestion of classrooms, procurement of current publications in libraries and INSET training of lecturers on the new Minimum Standards for a successful implementation of the curriculum.

Keywords: Certificate in education, education standards, English language

Introduction

The colleges of education in Nigeria are the 'train-the-trainers' colleges as they are responsible for the production of teachers at the primary and junior secondary levels. The colleges as stated in Federal Colleges of Education Act (1986, No. 4) are to perform the following functions:

- a. To provide full time courses in teaching, instruction and training in:
 - i. technology, applied science, humanities and management
 - ii. such other fields of applied learning relevant to the development of Nigeria
- b. To conduct courses in education for qualified teachers
- c. To arrange conferences, seminars and workshops relative to the fields of learning specified in paragraph (a) of this section
- d. To perform other functions as in the opinion of the Council may serve to promote the objectives of the college.

The Nigeria Certificate in Education is the basic qualification for teaching in Nigeria. It is a sub-degree (certification course) and a professional teacher diploma, which is obtained after 3 years (full time) at a college of education (Lassa, 2000). The graduates of the

programme are qualified to teach the first nine years of schooling (six years of primary and three years of junior secondary education). The Decree (1985, No. 16) was enacted on National Minimum Standards and this paved the way for the first and subsequent editions of the National Minimum Standards (Curriculum) of Colleges of Education. The curriculum is implemented in colleges of education. This paper intends to show that certain modalities are needed for the successful implementation of the Minimum Standards (English Language Curriculum).

The Revised Nigeria Certificate in Education Minimum Standards

A curriculum is one aspect in the educational system that cannot be overemphasised. It is usually printed in black and white and expected that it will be implemented in schools. Scholars have given their views on curriculum in Nigeria. In the opinion of Okebukola (2013), curriculum in Nigeria is theoretically oriented and irrelevant to the future demands of students. This view was corroborated by Uma, Obidike and Ogwuru (2013, p. 332) when they mentioned that ‘the prevailing pattern of education after independence was criticized on the ground of irrelevant curriculum...’. The significance of the aforementioned views is clearly evident in the recent review of the Nigeria Certificate in Education Minimum Standards (Curriculum).

The National Commission for Colleges of Education as established by the Act (formerly Decree) 13 of 17 January 1987 (Amended Act 12 of 1993) is ‘the third leg of the tripod of excellence’ in the regulation of higher education in Nigeria (Nigeria Certificate in Education Minimum Standards for Languages, 2012, p. iv). The agency supervises teacher education, accredits programmes and reviews the curriculum for colleges of education. The new curriculum is a consequence of a range of activities such as conferences, workshops, critiquing sessions etc (Curriculum Implementation Framework for NCE, 2012).

The first production of the NCCE Minimum Standards occurred in 1990 and this entailed a study and seminar on the NCE Programmes offered in various parts of Nigeria (NCCE 1990, cited in Abelega, 2007). In addition, the programmes were evaluated and revised. The fourth edition was produced in 2008 and was trailed by wide spread criticism. The latest edition (Specialist Minimum Standards) was produced in 2012, sequel to conferences, critiquing sessions and seminars held (Curriculum Implementation Framework, 2012). The latest review was necessary to comply with the needs of the New Basic Education Curriculum and to address the issue of the production of quality teachers in the country.

According to Otunuyi (2013, p. 4) the new curriculum has been reviewed from the ‘out-dated one-size-fits-all the model to specialist level oriented one’. In other words, student teachers are expected to specialize in different levels of the Universal Basic Education. The reviewed documents were the outputs of sessions aimed at the establishing standards that would enhance the on- the- job skills of teachers. This revision has established a new structure and courses for the NCE programmes. The agency aims at providing quality teachers for the lower levels of education in the country. The new teacher education programmes comprise:

- *Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE)*
- *Primary Education*
- *Junior Secondary School (JSS)*
- *Adult and Non-formal Education*
- *Special Education* (Curriculum Implementation Framework for NCE, 2012)

The corollary of the above specialised professional teaching programmes and the revised documents is the production of an Implementation Framework that would guide the execution of the innovations. The Framework has been designed to enable uniformity and

bench marking of standards in all the institutions and also channel the functioning of the new structure and systems.

The New Institutional Structure

The new institutional structure to guide the implementation of the curriculum consists of seven schools with different departments. The schools are: Art and Social Science, Languages, Education, Science, Vocational and Technical, Early Childhood Care and Education & Primary Education, Adult Non-formal Education & Special New Education. The School of Languages comprises the Departments of English, French, Arabic, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba and other Nigerian Languages or the division could be the Departments of Modern Languages and Nigerian Languages. At the helm of affairs in the schools would be the Deans and the heads of department in each school. The curriculums for the school of languages are embedded in a document entitled Nigeria Certificate in Education Minimum Standards for Languages.

Educational Approach

The new curriculum emphasizes learning. In other words, the acquisition of skills, attitudes and knowledge are of paramount importance. This contradicts an earlier approach, which promoted the transmission of contents, without the cognizance of the achievement of learning outcomes. The curriculum places emphasis on subject contents and the germane methodology for teaching them (Otunuyi, 2013). It also stresses the necessity for learner centeredness and integration of technology into the teaching and learning process. It provides for the reorientation of the lecturers for the successful implementation of the curriculum. The shift also entails lecturers creating environments for the construction of skills, attitudes and knowledge by students.

The new educational approach offers the integration of education courses that would lead to the application of theory. The learning materials would be of diverse formats with the effective use of technological mediums. The method of teaching would be through learning experiences that would include lecturing, group work etc. The teaching practice would equip student teachers with the knowledge of programme design, so that they would be able to impart same. Student teachers will provide learning experiences that promote practical skills development in their own students.

Learning Opportunities

Lecturers are also expected to create learning environments for dispensing learning qualitative education in the institutions. This means engaging the students in individual or group activities that would enhance their attainment of skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Assessment

Assessment now entails a measurement of learning outcomes. The implementation Framework (2012) stipulates that results of continuous assessments be handed in within four weeks, while for examinations, it should be within eight weeks. It also labels assessment as 'pivotal'. The reform provides that an internal quality assurance unit be established in each school for monitoring, collation and storage of data on assessment. The Minimum Standards prescribes (60:40) examination (Implementation Framework, 2012, p. 18). The CA would consist of an individual and a group exercise and also written and practical tests.

Basic modifications of the NCE programmes as it relates to the English language Curriculum

Philosophy

The philosophy of the programme embraced a new paradigm shift from the perspective of language as an instrument for communal life, to the idea of language as a vehicle for transferability of knowledge to junior secondary level students and for the growth of teacher trainees.

Objectives

The new curriculum emphasizes the communicative purpose of language as it states that one of the objectives of the curriculum is 'to develop the four language skills' for the purpose of communication (Nigeria certificate in Education Minimum Standards for Languages, 2012, p. 21). Furthermore, the teacher trainees under the new curriculum would be equipped to teach English to junior secondary students alone and not primary as stated in the previous curriculum. In addition, the previous objective of the curriculum on the acquisition of critical skills by teacher trainees has been deleted.

Facilities

The curriculum briefly gives a distinction between student and teachers' facilities. The major highlight of the facilities needed for students is that it is technology based. The same applies to the staff, who are to have magnetic boards for tutorials and internet connectivity in their offices.

Methodology

The curriculum lays emphasis on new teaching methods that should be student participatory and student centred. It also made tutorials mandatory for English and Literature courses.

Professional/ Academic Associations

The curriculum is explicit on the academic associations available to staff and students. A list of the academic associations accessible to staff and students are:

- a. *ESAN-English language Students' Association*
- b. *Literary and Debating Association/Society*
- c. *Writers' Club*
- d. *Reading Association of Nigeria (RAN)*
- e. *English language Teachers' Association of Nigeria (ELTAN)*
- f. *Linguistic Association of Nigeria (LAN) etc.* (NCE Minimum Standards for Languages, 2012, p. 24).

Courses

The new courses introduced into the curriculum are: The Introduction to Literature- ENG 114, Selected European Authors- ENG 213, Summary Writing Skills- ENG 222, Critical Theory and Practical Criticism –ENG 223, Young Adult Literature-ENG 22, Long Essay- ENG 321, Theatre and Drama Education- ENG 323 and Orature ENG-325.

A Critique of the NCE Minimum Standards for Languages (English Language Curriculum)

The new NCE Curriculum for English language depicts a bold stride undertaken by the National Commission for Colleges of Education to ensure quality education at the lower levels of education and also at the teacher training stage. The review of the curriculum is in

accordance with earlier calls for a review of teacher education curriculum in the country (Dada, 2004; Slavin, 1987, Evans, 1992 cited in Olaofe, n.d).It is expected that this would lead to an improvement in quality of teacher training education.

Furthermore, a number of scholars had emphasized the irrelevance of the curriculum contents of the NCE curriculum (Education Sector Analysis 2002, 2008, Ajelayemi 2005, Okebukola 2005, Teacher Education Policy 2007, Education Support Programme in Nigeria (ESSPIN),Input Visit Report cited in Adeosun, 2011) to the needs of the lower levels of education. The new curriculum recognizes this fact and modified the teacher education programme to comprise Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE), Primary Education, Junior Secondary School (JSS), Adult and Non-formal Education and Special Education.

The shift in educational approach with emphasis on the acquisition of skills, attitudes and knowledge is a laudable feat as one of the criticisms of the previous curriculum had been the placement of premium on success in examination rather than the acquisition of skills and attitudes (Dada, 2004). Moreover, the curriculum was seen as overly theoretical without much opportunity for the development of skills (Ajelayemi, 2005).

However, the new curriculum failed to address the issue of quality of entrants into the colleges of education (Akinbote, 2000 cited in Akinbote, 2007; Kniper et al., 2008) as the requirements for admission into the colleges were not amended to capture the best brains in the society.The quality of students admitted into the colleges has been faulted. This factor has been attributed to the mediocre quality of graduates produced by the colleges (Akinbote,2000 cited in Akinbote,2007).It was also noted that the admission of these poor quality of candidates has had a negative effect on the teaching profession (Liberman,1956;Akinbote, 2000,cited in Akinbote, 2007). In the same vein, it did not address the issue of teaching practice duration as it had been critiqued as being too short and poorly supervised (Ajelayemi, 2005).

The curriculum recommends participatory and interactive approach in the delivery of lessons. It also made tutorials mandatory for language and literature courses. The extent to which this can be achieved is in doubt as an overcrowded classroom is one of the issues plaguing curriculum implementation in the country (Olusola&Rotimi, 2012). In addition, one of the objectives of the curriculum, which is to equip students to teach English effectively at the junior secondary level may turn out to be a debacle as student teachers are not exposed to strategies that promote language learning(Olaofe, n.d).

The latest innovation provides for the integration of technology into the teaching and learning process and ICT based classrooms. The attainment of this provision may not be feasible if the necessary technological equipment are not dispensed as Adedjei (2011) has noted that the government and college authorities have failed to furnish the colleges with ICT gadgets.The implementation of a curriculum in an institution requires teaching /learning facilities for its successful implementation (Lawanson&Gede, 2011).

The problem of facilities in higher institutions in Nigeria is not limited to colleges of education as the Federal Government of Nigeria (2000, cited in Uma, Obidike&Ogwuru, 2013)) has noted that all levels of education in Nigeria are deficient in the provision of teachers, principal infrastructure that includes instructional materials and resort centres. This view had been confirmed by Onadeko (2008), when he declared that libraries and language laboratories in colleges are not adequate for students and that they are virtually empty. In addition, apart from the availability of these information technology gadgets, most lecturers lack the technical ingenuity to handle e-learning and e-teaching resources (Adedjei, 2011).

It also appears that the curriculum is based on the notion that the requisite facilities for the implementation of the curriculum are available in all the schools. This is contrary to the report of the NCCE (National Commission for Colleges of Education, 2001) that the

federal colleges are better staffed and resourced than the state college; therefore, the curriculum cannot be implemented in the same manner in all the schools (Umar, 2006).

Furthermore, Mohammed (2012) established the fact that the libraries in most colleges of education in the north central states of Nigeria lack sufficient journal publications and textbooks. The textbooks in stock were also found not to be current. He deduced that this could in a way; account for the poor performance of students in English language in the colleges of education (Adeyanju, 2005; 2006). This corroborates the view of Adeogun (2001, cited in Adeogun&Osifila, n.d) that ‘a positive and significant relationship exists between instructional materials and academic performance’.

Lastly, the production of an implementation framework is commendable but it may not achieve its aim if teachers lack the skill to apply it to ensure productive teaching in classrooms (Olaofe, n.d).

Conclusions and Recommendation

The paper has given a succinct critique of the revised Nigeria Certificate in Education Minimum Standards(English language Curriculum).The appraisal makes it apparent that the successful implementation of the curriculum would require putting the necessary mechanisms in place and adopting a proactive action to enhance implementation .The following strategies will contribute to the achievement of the feat:

- i. The government should review the admission requirements to capture the best brains in the society. If the standard of the college entrants is poor, they will not be able to sequence knowledge and provide learning experiences.
- ii. The overcrowded classrooms should be decongested if tutorials are requisite for all language and literature courses.
- iii. The libraries should be stocked with current publications and books; so that students can have access to materials that will aid learning.
- iv. Technological facilities should be dispensed if learning materials must be in varied formats such as video, digital, internet etc. Internet connectivity is a major problem in the country.
- v. Labour and student unrest should be tackled by the government, if the curriculum is to be successfully implemented. The current dispute (at the time of writing) between the lecturers (COEASU) and the Federal government is an instance of this situation.These disputes usually linger for months and in turn affect the quality of teaching and learning as students are forced to learn within a shorter period of time. This is an external factor that hinders curriculum implementation.
- vi. The college authorities should organise workshops and seminars at various levels in all the colleges to acquaint the lecturers with the modalities necessary for the implementation of the curriculum.

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